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AN

ORATION,

DELIVERED BEFORE THE

DIFFERENT REPUBLICAN SOCIETIES,

AT THE THEATRE, ANTHONY-ST. NEW-YORK,

ON THE

ANNIVERSARY

OF

AMERICAN INDEPENDENCE,

JULY 4, 1814.

—
BY HENRY WHEATON, ESQ.

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AN ORATION,

&c.

FELLOW CITIZENS !

THE importance of the occasion on which we are assembled, is enhanced by the wonderful events of the times in which we live. In an age of revolutions, we are celebrating the anniversary of the American revolution. The principles which produced that great event, after making almost the circuit of the universe—shaking thrones—convulsing empires—and changing the face of Europe, have at last returned to repose in this their native seat,—from which alone they have never been exiled. These principles of civil and religious liberty were borne across the Atlantic by our forefathers, when driven from their native shores. These were their household gods—the dear companions of their flight—the precious legacy which they have left to us, their descendants. Whether exiled from Holland, from France, from Ireland, or from England ;—these were the guardian angels that guided their flight across the trackless ocean. Whether Protestants or Catholics, they were alike the victims of political and ecclesiastical persecution—the ardent votaries of civil and religious freedom. It is the proud distinction of the people of this

country, that *they never were slaves*—never bowed the knee to mortal power—never extinguished the holy flame of liberty.

Let not the feelings of exultation which animate us on this occasion be imputed to national vanity. No! they are the offspring of a nobler sentiment—the parents of great and glorious achievement. The consciousness that ours is the congenial soil of freedom, refreshes the patriotic mind, purifies all its emotions, and inspires it with manly courage to defend from spoliation this magnificent heritage; this temple of liberty; this last asylum of oppressed humanity. The founders of the Republic trod in the steps of their fathers who colonized this new world. To preserve what the former had established was their end and aim. For this, they toiled, and fought, and bled. To attain this object, they dared to encounter Britain in the zenith of her power—to resist those prejudices which enforced obedience to her mandates as a duty of filial piety—and to rush into the arms of a rival nation, whom they had ever been taught to consider as her, and their, natural enemy. For this, they did not hesitate to denounce their king as a *prince whose character was marked by every act which might define a tyrant, and as unfit to be the ruler of a free people.* For this they broke the ties that bound them to their *British brethren*, and declared that *they must acquiesce in the necessity which denounced their*

separation, and hold them as they held the rest of mankind—enemies in war; in peace, friends. These immortal heroes and sages resisted the first encroachments upon those rights which were equally theirs by the gift of the bountiful Creator, as by the chartered concessions of the mother country. They did not wait until their limbs were bound in chains, and their necks bent to the yoke. “They augured mis-government at a distance; and snuffed the approach of tyranny in every tainted breeze.” The religious faith which separates piety from patriotism was unknown to them. They disclaimed any paltry compromise of future oppression for present convenience.—They were not independent; yet they scorned submission. They were not rich; yet, poor as they were, all the wealth of the British exchequer could not buy them. They were destitute of revenue—of fortifications—of an army—of a navy—of the munitions of war; yet they dared to repel the attacks of their parent country, flushed with recent triumph over the house of Bourbon, proud of the achievements of Wolfe and of Chatham, and looking down from the eminence of her empire with scornful contempt upon their lowly condition. The war which was waged against them by him who aimed to be their tyrant, was stamped with the most atrocious features. He brought *on the inhabitants of their frontiers the merciless Indian savages, whose known rule of warfare is*

an undistinguishing destruction of all ages, sexes, and conditions of existence. “ Determined to keep open a market where men should be bought and sold, he prostituted his negative for suppressing every legislative attempt to prohibit or restrain the execrable commerce in African slaves ; and then excited this very people to rise in arms among them, and to purchase that liberty of which he had deprived them, by murdering the people upon whom he also obtruded them ; thus paying off former crimes committed against the liberties of one people, with crimes which he urged them to commit against the lives of another.” A parricidal party in the bosom of the land, the enemies of liberty and of their country, supported his pretensions. The horrors of savage, servile, and civil war, were accumulated. Yet these horrors, added to proscription and the peril of ignominious death, struck no terror to the hearts of the men who had aspired to achieve the independence of America. Animated by the great example of their forefathers; and emulating the patriotism of Greece and Rome, they transcended both, and burst upon a degenerate age with all the virtue of ancient Republicanism, and all the splendour of modern chivalry.

The story of their achievements has been so often told, and is so well known to my auditors, that I should justly incur reproach were I here

to repeat the tale. It is the business of the historian to fill up this canvass with a pencil worthy of the subject. It is the business of him who addresses you on this occasion, to call to mind the importance of those principles which produced the war of the revolution ; to apply the bright examples of public virtue, with which it abounds, to the exigencies of the present times ; and to show how great was the price our fathers paid for independence—how inestimable the value of the acquisition.

The principles by which that war was produced, howsoever they may have been abused and perverted in the recent revolutions of Europe ; howsoever they may have been corrupted by an unintelligible metaphysical jargon ; or derided by despots, who sought to destroy them—still remain indelibly engraven on the heart of man, and consecrated by all the blood of all the martyrs who have died in their defence. *That all men are born free and equal ; that they are endowed by their Creator with the unalienable rights of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness ; that to secure these rights governments are instituted among men, subject to be altered, or abolished by the people, whenever they become destructive of this end*—are immortal and imperishable truths, which no abuse can change—no sophistry destroy—and no lapse of time obliterate. Upon these broad and solid foundations are built our constitutions. These form the corner-stone on which they rest, and the key-stone by which

they are bound together. And shall we doubt the durability of the structure? Has it not sheltered us from the storms and tempests of revolution? Has it not protected us against foreign invasion and internal faction? Has it not proved our impregnable citadel in war, and our inviolate temple in peace?—The converse of these are the principles which consider governments and nations as the property of rulers, liable to be inherited and entailed—to be alienated and bequeathed, and held “in contempt of the choice of the people.” They confound intelligent existences with stocks and stones—efface the image of God in man—and degrade him below the level of the brutes: They are supported by fictions revolting to reason and common sense: The ubiquity, immortality, and irresponsibility of the king—That virtue and wisdom are heritable qualities—that one man is born a legislator and judge, and another a subject or slave. Such are the absurdities current in those regions whose wretched destiny it is to be swayed by these false principles of government. We may therefore thank “the happier fortune of our stars” which has cast our lot in a land of light and liberty—where man walks forth in the original majesty of his nature—where no distinctions are known but those of talents, and virtue, and education. Indeed, the mass of public happiness which smiles over the surface of our territory, is the best eulogium that can be pro-

nounced upon our political institutions. It speaks in language too eloquent not to persuade—too intelligible not to convince. Here agriculture, the basis of national prosperity, reaps in security the fruits of its labour and skill, and the bounty of God is not blasted by the wickedness of man. Here, justice holds with steady hand her even balance, and strikes with equal rigour the rich and the poor, tempering with mercy her dispensations to all. Here the intonations of praise, and the incense of adoration, ascend from temples in which the Supreme Being is worshipped in an infinitely diversified variety of forms, all equally protected by the impartial tolerance of the law, and leaving open the road to honour and to office alike to every citizen professing them. Here, the press is truly “a chartered libertine,” free as the air we breathe; and if it sometimes wounds with its shafts, it bears healing on its wings: if it shakes with its thunders, it purifies the political atmosphere with its lightnings: if it carries with it a bane, it has also an antidote.

Such is the fair fabric of our political society, and such the blessings it diffuses. Are not its charms sufficient to attract our undivided love—to extinguish in our bosoms every foreign feeling and prejudice, and to purify and exalt the instinct of patriotism, by convincing us that our native land is not less an object of rational attachment than of natural affection? If, in countries where

man is for ever chained to the soil on which he grew, and with it handed over from one master to another, this affection still adheres to his heart, and nerves his arm to cleave down the invader who comes to spoil the land that gave him birth,— how much more lofty and bold must be the love of country implanted by nature in the human breast, nurtured by reason, and kept alive by every sentiment that distinguishes the human species from the brute creation ! Open the volume of history, and conviction will flash upon your minds that the patriotism which is kindled by freedom is the parent of godlike achievements.

Bear witness, Greece, thy living page,
 Attest it many a deathless age !
 While kings in dusty darkness hid,
 Have left a nameless pyramid,
 Thy heroes—though the general doom
 Hath swept the column from their tomb,
 A mightier monument command,
 The mountains of their native land !

It was this omnipotent hand which raised the trophies of Marathon and Thermopylæ, of Salamis and Platæa ;—which kindled anew the expiring flame of Polish independence to consume the barbarians who came to extinguish it, and fired the hearts of that gallant nation to stab, with the courageous despair of the dying gladiator, its cruel antagonists ;—which revived the glorious field of Morgarthen, and when men, professing to be free,

profaned the very temple of liberty, hurled vengeance upon them from the highest Alps. But why do I recur to foreign and ancient examples? Here—in this our native land, and within the recollection of many now present, liberty has “enacted more wonders” still. Witness Trenton, Saratoga, and Yorktown! O, immortal fields! which drank the blood of freemen and of slaves commingled in the conflict—will ye not attest the irresistible force of the love of freedom?

The war in which we are now engaged, whilst it affords fresh proofs of the potent influence of liberty, has exposed the virtue of our people to severer trials than any they have been hitherto summoned to encounter. Though sanctioned and sanctified by every principle that can justify an appeal to arms, and ennobled by every consideration dear to a high-minded nation, it has been so chequered with alternate prosperous and adverse fortune, and the motives and causes in which it originated have been so discoloured by faction and prejudice, that we present to other countries the disgraceful spectacle of a divided people: Yet if we compare those motives and causes with the catalogue of wrongs enumerated in the Declaration of Independence, we shall find that the latter shrink into nothingness on comparison with those articulated in the declaration of war. Scarcely had the delusive truce of Amiens expired, when the British encroachments on our neu-

tral rights commenced. The antiquated rule of the war of '56 was awakened from its long slumber, and let loose to prey upon our unsuspecting commerce ; a citizen murdered, and numberless other acts of violence committed within the sanctuary of our jurisdiction ; our property captured and confiscated under blockades no where existing but on the paper by which they were proclaimed ; millions plundered by orders in council, issued upon the false pretext of retortion ; and, when reluctantly repealed, the principle on which they were founded reserved, to be again called into action at the arbitrary discretion of the British government ; all atonement for indemnification for these injuries refused ; and to complete the climax of our wrongs--thousands of our citizens constrained to enter the British naval service ; an emissary delegated to foment disaffection to the union ; and the Indian savages excited to take up arms against us. Under these accumulated aggressions, amicable negociation was protracted until the thread of diplomacy, spun out to an immeasurable length, exhausted the patience of the people, and until the bitter cup of humiliation had been drained to the dregs. The constituted authorities then appealed to the LAST ARGUMENT OF KINGS AND OF NATIONS.—They declared the existence of that war which had been so long waged against us, and authorized the sword to be drawn in our defence. Our countrymen had

so long been fascinated with the blandishments of peace, that “grim visaged war” found them unprepared to encounter the horrors of “his “wrinkled front.” The military and civic virtues acquired in the revolution had declined. The gold which commerce so profusely showered upon our citizens, corrupted, whilst it enriched.—The heart of the merchant was ossified with avarice. The cultivator regarded more the price of his produce than the inestimable value of national honour. The repeal of the embargo laws, extorted from a panic struck legislature by the menaces of a few states, diffused a torpor over the body-politic which arrested the free and wholesome flow of its life-giving stream, and cramped and controlled its every motion. The declaration of war was the first measure which contributed to give new tone to the nerves of the state, and to re-invigorate its limbs. It snatched “a spark “from the altar of ’76,” and rekindled that spirit which sustained our former contest for independence. Was it not just? Was it not necessary? Was it not expedient? These questions being answered in the affirmative, however humanity may weep over the calamities it must bring in its train—true wisdom will decide to encounter the worst of them, rather than entail upon posterity the countless evils of submission, and disgrace, and slavery. Unless, therefore, we are prepared to say that the independence which was achieved

at the expense of so much blood and treasure, is not worth preserving, and of being transmitted entire to our posterity, or that the aggressions of Britain do not vitally affect this independence; we must admit that the present war is at once just, and necessary, and expedient. Unless we are prepared to say that the war of the revolution was unjust, unnecessary, and inexpedient—that our fathers would have shown more wisdom in

*— rather bearing those ills they had,
Than fly to others that they knew not of—*

and that the stamp-tax or tea-tax were unworthy objects for which to involve the country in the horrors of war—of civil war,—then we must admit that the present contest is consecrated by every sanction which can give dignity, or add lustre to human exertion. If these were objects worth contending for on account of their principle, what shall we say to the practice of impressments?—by which a tribute, not of money, but blood, is exacted from a free and independent nation, and an odious badge of slavery affixed to it, which any people would hardly bear from its own sovereign! If the invasion of our rights by the British king and parliament justified and required such a resistance as was opposed to them by the war of the revolution, the same resistance is now justified and required against this fatal

blow aimed at the liberties of our seafaring citizens, and the essential attributes of our sovereignty.

If this be the true character of the war, what epithets shall mark the conduct of those by whom it has been opposed? I speak not of a constitutional and temperate opposition. The influence of that would have been salutary, stimulating the activity of the government, and infusing fresh vigor into its measures. I speak of the opposition which has discouraged and impeded the recruiting service—withheld from the Union the militia of the eastern states—organized a system of fraud and falsehood, by which the public mind has been perverted and poisoned—abused the liberty of the press by prostituting it in the enemy's cause—and denounced the government and the laws from the sacred desk, where “no sound ‘ought to be heard but the healing voice of ‘Christian charity.’” Nor has the range of this opposition been limited within these extensive bounds. It has overleaped all restraints—and laying aside even the affectation of patriotism, received with cold indifference or sullen aversion, those glorious triumphs which gladdened the hearts of the people. We have not yet forgotten, when the fate of our gallant Lawrence was still dubious, and every true American awaited in breathless anxiety the tidings he dreaded to hear, how the sweet odour of public praise due to his suc-

cessful valour, was withheld upon the hypocritical pretext that it was “unbecoming a moral and religious people to express any approbation of military or naval exploits, not immediately connected with the defence of our sea-coast and soil.” In vain did a virtuous minority “plead trumpet-tongued against the deep damnation” of this deed. The records of Massachusetts are stained by it with an indelible disgrace which not all the waters of the ocean that lashes her shores can purify. The cradle of American liberty has become the grave of American honour; and a lustration is necessary to wash away this fatal stain, and to appease the manes of the illustrious dead.

Indignant shade! on wild Canadia's shore
 I see thee stand, whilst round the night-breeze moans,
 And pointing with thy shadowy hand,
 Thy voice exclaims—ungrateful land!
 Thou shalt not have my bones!

Contrasted with this unnatural heartlessness is the rapturous joy with which the victories of the coalesced kings of Europe have been hailed by the same men who could not find it consistent with their morality and religion to rejoice at “exploits not immediately connected with the defence of our sea-coast and soil”—but, who find it consistent enough with both, to rejoice at events which furnish our enemy with an immense disposable force for the attack of our sea-coast and soil.

Before we prepare to sympathize in this joy—let us see what are the fruits of these victories, and how distributed.

Instead of collecting the scattered fragments of dilapidated Poland into one vast monument of expiatory justice, restoring and re-edifying the fabric of Polish liberty, and placing as its guardian a descendant of that Sobieski, who saved the Austrian capital from Mohammedan spoliation, or the Poniatowsky, who poured out his truly noble blood at Leipsick—instead of this course, commanded equally by honour and by policy—the entire ruins of this once glorious country are reunited to reward the disinterested **DELIVERER** of Europe, and form another diadem to glitter on that brow which is already circled with gems plundered from every bordering nation. Is it for this we are called upon to rejoice? Or for the subjugation of the brave Norwegians, who have for ages repelled the rude wave of invasion that dashed against their bleak and barren shores, and driven from their iron frontier the ruthless foe;—who are menaced with famine by “the bulwark of our holy religion,” and with conquest by a neighbour whom neither they nor their government have injured or offended? Or is it for the restoration of the Stadholder, not as first magistrate of the Republic, but as sovereign prince of the Netherlands, and uncontrolled by those prudent safeguards, which the founders of

Batavian liberty had contrived, to restrain the excess of executive power? Or for the fate of France, who after sacrificing her ruler as a propitiation to her enemies, is stripped of her maritime provinces, and insulted by the triumphal entry of the betrayer and corrupter of Ireland into her capital? Or for the destiny of Venice, once the proud mistress of the Adriatic, but now swallowed up in the dominion of Austria, instead of being restored to her ancient senate—or of Saxony, whose aged monarch is dethroned as a punishment for his fidelity to the man who made him a king, and whose people are passed under the Prussian yoke?

If we do not find matter for exultation in this contrast of profession and practice, in this wreck of principle and of justice; perhaps we may seek for it in the cold calculations of self-interest, and in the share of benefits we are to receive from the lavish bounty of imperial and royal magnanimity. How long will it continue to be our policy to look abroad for safety, instead of relying upon our internal resources?—to depend upon the friendship, justice, and good faith of kings and courts, instead of reposing upon the virtue and courage of our own people?—to fight our battles in Europe, instead of making one vigorous and united effort to sweep our enemies from this continent? How long shall we continue bound, Ixion-like, to the wheel of European revo-

lutions? When shall we avert our eyes from the old world, deformed as it is with the ruins of public law and liberty, and turn them upon the new—the only refuge left for freedom? But, if we cannot console ourselves with the hope that Britain's allies will interpose, we may possibly rely upon the generous policy of our enemy herself, whose character it is to war against the proud, and whose temper it may be to spare the submissive. Still less safety shall we find in this resource. That the British government most reluctantly acknowledged our independence—that they have never lost sight of the policy of endeavouring to recolonize us, by resorting to the arts of intrigue and seduction—of corruption and division, are truths which will not be contested by those who are acquainted with human nature, or versed in the history of our international relations.

— th' unconquerable will,
And study of revenge, immortal hate,

still rankle in the breasts of the British court and ministry. The former, like all other courts, never forget, or acquiesce in, the loss of dominion ; whilst the latter are the true, direct, lineal descendants of the Butes and the Norths, who would have reduced America to the same state of vassalage to which their successors have reduced Ireland. That they should strive to partition the Union is not therefore to be wondered at. But that their infatuation should suggest visions of conquest and recolonization, may seem

to indicate a disorder of the imagination worthy of the pencil of Cervantes. Ridiculous as it may appear, however, we shall see this anticipation realized, unless the government and people arouse from their present apathy. Once dreaded, we are still hated as rivals in commerce, in manufactures, and in naval power. To extinguish for ever our rivalship in the ruins of our independence, is not less an object of British policy, than was the destruction of the military greatness, the ships, colonies, and commerce of imperial France. The sober freedom of our constitution is not less an object of aversion than was the dazzling splendour of Napoleon's despotism. Contracted as is the sphere within which our naval victories have been achieved, they contain the germ of a future greatness that may snatch the trident of Neptune from the sovereign of the seas.—The awful dangers of the crisis admonish us to *Union*. In that one word is contained a potent charm, that could we wear it near our hearts, would assure our safety in any perils that may await us. We must now gather the fair fruits of peace which hang on the precipice of degradation, beneath which the abyss yawns for our independence; or we must grasp them on the field of battle where valour is the herald of victory. And why should we repine at this our destiny, since it was that of all free nations which have gone before us? That liberty which was gained by arms, by

...st be maintained. Who is there base enough to wish to survive his country's freedom? to see this smiling abode of justice, liberty, and happiness, where he had "garnered up his heart,"—bleeding beneath the conqueror's sword, or groaning under the conqueror's yoke—to behold the tombs of his ancestors overturned, the temples of his God defiled, the sanctuary of his household violated, and slavery the only portion of his children? And is there any still baser wretch—

a coward living
To die with lengthen'd shame,

who would wish to purchase peace by a sacrifice of national interests, and rights, and honour? to see us descend from that rank in the scale of nations to which the virtue and valour of our fathers exalted us? If any such there be, let him stand

A fixed figure for the time of scorn
To point his slow unmoving finger at.

War is an evil which has long been the reproach of humanity, and the copious theme of declamation; but unhappily, from a mysterious law of our nature, it is an evil which must still be encountered. The visions of philanthropy, and the hopes of the Christian, have not been realized. *Erunt vitia donec homines*, is the sententious remark of a profound historian, the truth of which has been confirmed by the experience of ages. *There will be vices, and consequently war, as long*

as there are men. War, with all its horrors, is the price which nations must occasionally pay for their freedom and independence—the only alternative opposed to degradation and ruin; but like other evils which beset the chequered life of man, it has its uses, and in the eternal order of things, seems as necessary to the moral, as are storms and tempests to the natural world. “The cloud-capt tower, the gorgeous palace”—may be laid in ruins, the valley inundated, and the oak rent from his native hills; but elasticity and health have been restored to a stagnant and pestilential atmosphere, and renovated nature goes on rejoicing in her course. It is in war that the best faculties of man have been developed, his noblest virtues invigorated, and that undefined principle of honour kept alive in his bosom, which is, with individuals and with nations, the surest safeguard to integrity, and the best title to respect. It is war “that makes ambition virtue.” The effeminate poet may prate of “Macedonia’s madman,” and the satirist of a degenerate age may jeer at the hero of Carthage, with his—*I demens et curre per Alpes*—but magnanimous enterprise, persevering valour, and noble achievement, have secured them a niche in the temple of immortality; and the names of Alexander and of Hannibal, continue, in spite of detraction, to command the admiration of men. From the matchless effulgence of their exploits,

the soldier catches a portion of “ those more than mortal fires, which raise him far above the men of all other professions, and which, in the universal sense of mankind, have even ranked him with the Gods.” If war in the abstract, is productive of good in regenerating and exalting the human character, when waged in defence of freedom and independence, and in vindicating national rights from insult and rapacity—war is consecrated in the adoption ; and prosecuted by a people true to themselves will rarely fail of attaining the objects in view. For though disasters may await, clouds and darkness overhang the prospect—its ultimate effect will be to revive those principles which cannot readily lose their force—to render man not only deserving, but capable of the enjoyment of those rights for which he has contended.

For freedom's battle once begun,
Bequeath'd by bleeding sire to son,
Though baffled oft, is ever won.

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